

## Frequently Asked Questions about Chlamydia

### What is Chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD) which can damage a woman's reproductive organs. Chlamydia is often called a "silent" infection because it can cause serious complications even when no signs or symptoms are present.

### How common is chlamydia?

Chlamydia is the highest reported STD in the United States and the highest reported infectious disease in New Jersey. In 2012, there were more than 1.4 million cases of chlamydia reported in the U.S. More than 27,000 cases were reported in New Jersey in 2012. Many more cases of chlamydia are not reported because people do not know they are infected.

### How do people get chlamydia?

Chlamydia can be transmitted during vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Chlamydia can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during vaginal childbirth. Anyone who has ever had oral, anal or vaginal sex can be infected with chlamydia. Sexually active teenage girls and young women have an increased risk for chlamydia because their cervix (opening to the uterus) is not fully matured and may be more susceptible to infection.

### What are the signs and symptoms of chlamydia?

Most people with chlamydia do not have any symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they usually appear within 1 to 3 weeks after exposure.

Possible symptoms in women include an abnormal vaginal discharge or a burning sensation when urinating. Other symptoms might be lower abdominal pain, low back pain, nausea, fever, pain during intercourse, or bleeding between menstrual periods.

Men who have symptoms might have a discharge from their penis, a burning sensation when urinating, or burning and itching around the opening of the penis.

Chlamydial infection in the rectum (anus) in men or women can cause rectal pain, discharge, or bleeding. Chlamydia can also infect the throat if having oral sex with an infected partner.

### What health risks are associated with chlamydia?

In women, untreated chlamydia can spread into the uterus or fallopian tubes and cause Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID). Although symptoms might be very mild, PID can cause permanent damage to the fallopian tubes, uterus, and surrounding tissues which can lead to chronic pelvic pain, infertility, and potentially fatal ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus, usually in the fallopian tubes).

Complications among men are rare. Infection can spread to the epididymis (the tube that carries sperm from the testis), causing pain, fever, and in rare cases, sterility.

Chlamydia may also increase the chances of becoming infected with HIV if exposed to the HIV virus. Also, people who have both chlamydia and HIV are more likely to pass HIV to a sex partner than if they did not have chlamydia.

## **How does chlamydia affect pregnant women?**

Untreated chlamydial infections can lead to premature delivery. Also, babies who are born to infected mothers can get chlamydial infections in their eyes and respiratory tracts. Chlamydia is a leading cause of pneumonia and conjunctivitis (pink eye) in newborns.

## **How is chlamydia diagnosed?**

A health care provider takes urine samples or swab samples from infected sites (such as the cervix, penis or anus) and sends them to a laboratory to diagnose chlamydia.

## **How is chlamydia treated?**

Chlamydia can be easily treated and cured with antibiotics. A single dose of azithromycin or a week of doxycycline (twice daily) are the most commonly used treatments.

All sex partners of people diagnosed with chlamydia should be contacted so they can be examined, tested, and treated. Persons with chlamydia should abstain from oral, anal or vaginal sex until they and their sex partners have completed treatment, otherwise re-infection is possible. Re-testing is encouraged three months after treatment, especially if it is unknown if partners have been properly treated.

## **How can chlamydia be prevented?**

The surest way to avoid getting or passing STDs is to abstain from any sexual contact, including oral, anal and vaginal sex. Other ways to lower the risk of getting or passing an STD include being in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected, and using latex or polyurethane condoms correctly from the beginning to end of every sex act.

CDC recommends yearly chlamydia testing of all sexually active women age 25 or younger, older women who have a new sex partner or multiple sex partners, and all pregnant women. Also, anyone who has any unusual genital or anal symptom should be examined and tested by a health care provider immediately.

All sex partners of anyone diagnosed with chlamydia should be notified so they can be seen by a health care provider. This will reduce the risk of them developing any serious complications and will also reduce the risk of re-infection. Sexual activity should not be resumed until all partners have been tested and, if necessary, treated.

## **Where can I get more information?**

- Your healthcare provider
- New Jersey Department of Health website: [www.nj.gov/health](http://www.nj.gov/health)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: [www.cdc.gov/std/chlamydia/](http://www.cdc.gov/std/chlamydia/)
- CDC-INFO Contact Center at:  
English and Spanish  
(800) CDC-INFO  
(800) 232-4636  
**TTY: (888) 232-6348**

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a healthcare professional. Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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